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THE UNITED STATES NAVAL OBSERVATORY.

In the last Report of the Superintendent of the U. S. Naval Observatory at Washington (extracts from which were given in these *Publications*, Vol. III, 1891, page 74), attention was called to the needs of the Institution. The Honorable Secretary of the Navy has given consideration to the subject and his conclusions are stated in the following paragraphs.

[*Extract from the Report of the Secretary of the Navy* for 1891.]

"NAVAL OBSERVATORY.

"The work on the new Naval Observatory has advanced so far that the transfer from the old to the new site will shortly be undertaken. The failure of the contractors has delayed the work of the new building, now in its final stage, but the government is amply protected, and arrangements are now making under the provisions of the contract by which its early completion may be assured.

"When the transfer and installation of the instruments are completed, the government will be in possession of one of the most admirably equipped observatories in the world. The question of the proper administration of this important charge, representing one of the most important branches of scientific investigation undertaken by the government, is one that demands early attention. The system in existence hitherto, by which the selection of the superintendent has been confined to line officers of the navy, subject like other officers to changes of duty at comparatively short intervals, prevents that continuity of administration which is essential in carrying on the work of a great national observatory. No programme of scientific investigation, especially in the department of astronomy, can be carried out successfully by any institution, if liable to frequent interruptions by a change of its administrative head.

"I therefore recommend the adoption of legislation which shall enable the President to appoint, at a sufficient salary, without restriction from persons either within or outside of the naval service, the ablest and most accomplished astronomer who can be found for the position of superintendent.

"I would also recommend, in view of the era of progress and scientific development upon which the observatory is now entering, that an advisory council be organized, composed of the superintendent of the observatory and its senior professor, and of three other persons of scientific attainments, whose duty it shall be to consider and report upon new instruments and their proper installation; to draw up, with such changes as may be necessary, from time to time, the programme of scientific work, including observation, reduction and publication, and to make such inspections and reports as may be desirable in regard to the character of the work done by the observatory."

With this official encouragement the Astronomers of the United States have very generally signed the following petition to Congress.*

To the Congress of the United States:

"Your petitioners respectfully call attention to the question of the future administration of the new Naval Observatory, as one entitled to your careful consideration. The buildings for this establishment are now being completed on a scale and at an expense which, we believe, have never been equaled in the case of any national institution devoted to celestial research. The magnitude of the appropriations made by four successive congresses for this purpose clearly expresses the popular will that the astronomical observatory of the nation should be second to none in the value and interest of its work.

"We therefore respectfully set forth the fact that buildings and instruments are not the chief conditions of success. A well-considered plan of work, pursued with zeal under competent scientific direction, is absolutely essential. A body of the ablest astronomers, thrown together without adequate guidance, without any problem to solve, and without a concerted plan of work, can no more achieve success than an army can march and fight without a general. All experience shows that the success or failure of a scientific as of a business institution depends upon its directing head.

"By the labors of many generators of investigators, astronomy has now become a science of such extent that those only who make its cultivation the principal business of their lives can keep pace with its progress, and decide how the energies of a corps of astronomers should be directed.

"The proper administration of the observatory now being completed, therefore, requires that its direction should be placed in the hands of a practical astronomer, and we respectfully ask for such legislation as will secure this end."

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* This petition was signed by all the Astronomers of the Lick Observatory.

It is to be hoped that some action in this very important matter will be reached during the present session, and those members of the A. S. P. who are interested can do valuable service by writing to their Senators and Representatives in Congress setting forth the reasons why such action is desirable. E. S. H.

"A METEORIC CRATER.

"FLAGSTAFF (ARIZONA), NOV. 30, 1891.

"G. K. GILBERT and MARCUS BAKER, the former being Chief Geologist of the U. S. Geological Survey, have returned from the Cañon Diablo, where they were sent by the Government to make a map of the region where so much meteoric iron has recently been found.

"They spent sixteen days investigating the mammoth hole in the ground supposed to have been made by a meteor. This hole is 625 feet deep and two and one-eighth miles in circumference.

"The theory is, from the appearance of the walls and from the fact that there have been found many pieces of meteoric iron around the hole, that the meteor penetrated the earth to a depth of 700 or 800 feet before it exploded, and this accounts for the strange phenomenon.

"Three pieces of the meteor, weighing 300, 600 and 850 pounds, respectively, were found on the *mesa* within two miles of the crater and are now in the Smithsonian Institution. Besides these, they found many pieces weighing from two ounces upward.—Telegram to the San Francisco *Examiner*, Tuesday, December 1, 1891.

A BRIGHT METEOR.

NORDHOFF, VENTURA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA,
November 21, 1891.

E. S. HOLDEN, LL. D., *Mt. Hamilton, Cal.*

DEAR SIR: On Wednesday, the 18th inst., at about 10.30 o'clock, P. M., or perhaps a little later, a very strange and unusual phenomenon was noticed by a member of my family and another person, on returning from a concert. A sudden flash of